

Veterans Affairs Office of Lexington County



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VET NEWS

March 2009



Don't forget to "SPRING FORWARD!" - set your clocks **AHEAD one hour** on March 8th at 2 A.M.

VA To Offer Health Care to 265,000 Previously Ineligible Veterans

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced today plans to re-open enrollment in its health care system by July 2009 to about 265,000 veterans whose incomes exceed current limits.

"We're pleased to be able to offer what has been called 'the best care anywhere' to many more new veterans," said Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "We'll be able to provide these newly enrolled veterans with the kind of timely, high quality health care veterans who already use our system are accustomed to."

The change affects veterans whose incomes exceed the current VA means test and geographic means test income thresholds by 10 percent or less. Congress provided funds in VA's fiscal year 2009 budget to support the new enrollment.

In 1996, Congress established a priority-based enrollment system for VA and a uniform package of medical benefits for all enrollees. The legislation opened enrollment in VA's health care system to all eligible veterans and required that each year the Secretary of Veterans Affairs assess veterans' demand for services and determine if the necessary resources are available to provide timely, quality care to all enrollees.

Enrollment for the lowest priority of the eight groups—veterans who are not being compensated for a military-related disability and who have incomes above a set threshold—was suspended on January 18, 2003, although veterans in that priority group who were already enrolled for care were permitted to remain enrolled.

VA originally suspended enrollment for Priority 8 veterans because it was unable to provide all enrolled veterans with timely access to its health care due to a tremendous growth in the number of veterans then seeking enrollment.

MARCH DATES TO REMEMBER:

March 8th Daylight Savings Begins
March 17th St. Patrick's Day
March 20th Spring Begins



VA Health Care (continued)

VA now plans to reopen enrollment for a portion of these veterans without compromising the Department's ability to provide high quality health care services to all enrolled veterans who are eligible for care.

VA's computer systems are being modified to accommodate the changes, and the Department is preparing communication and education materials to ensure that Congress, veterans service organizations, and the public are aware of the coming changes.

"The rule will take effect by June 30, 2009, if the regulatory process proceeds smoothly," Peake said. "We look forward to welcoming these newly eligible veterans into the VA system. VA will continue to monitor wait times to ensure the quality of care is not adversely affected."

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

Due to budgetary constraints, the look of this newsletter will change.

The current issue is 6 pages, but by the end of July 2009, the newsletter will revert to a 4-page format.

SC HONOR FLIGHTS

The next scheduled SC HONOR FLIGHTS are set for April 15th and May 27th, 2009. Go to their website at www.honorflightsc.com for information on how to apply for future flights.

You may also call **803-582-8826** for more information on how to participate as a veteran, sponsor or volunteer.



VETERANS TRUST FUND OF SOUTH CAROLINA

The Veterans Trust Fund of South Carolina was created in 1995 to supplement/augment the quality of life for the veterans of South Carolina. Standard benefits and services for veterans do not always cover or meet their total needs; therefore, the Veterans Trust Fund of South Carolina was designed to:

- ◇ Make better the lifestyle of nursing home veterans
- ◇ Assist with transportation initiatives to and from VA Hospitals
 - ◇ Assist veterans groups in keeping Patriotism alive
 - ◇ Help establish memorials honoring veterans
 - ◇ Support educational scholarships
- ◇ Assist with established homeless veterans programs

If you would like more information about the Veterans Trust Fund, please contact: **Veterans Trust Fund of South Carolina** at 1205 Pendleton Street, Suite 369, Columbia, SC 29201 or call **(803) 734-0200**. ***South Carolinians have the opportunity to make certain contributions through their income tax returns. See **line 13** of **SC1040A** or **line 28** of **SC1040**. **Contributions to SC Veterans' Trust Fund** should be entered on **line item 4** of **SC form I-330**, and that **FORM** should be attached to **SC1040A** or **SC1040**.

YOUR DONATION TO THE VETERANS TRUST FUND OF SOUTH CAROLINA IS TAX-DEDUCTIBLE

There is still time to DONATE!!!



IT'S GIRL SCOUT COOKIE TIME AGAIN "Cookies for Troops" Effort Underway

COOKIE SALE PROGRAM DATES: Direct cookie sales to the public run from February 20 to March 16. Look for the Girl Scouts at a retailer/business near you. The Columbia, SC, Service Center is located at 130 Pinnacle Point Ct., Suite 100, Columbia, SC 29223. (Their phone # 803-782-5133.) You may reach any Girl Scout Service Center location by calling toll free at (800) 849-GIRL (4475).

The Midlands **Blue Star Mothers** will be shipping Girl Scout cookies to our deployed troops again this year. If you know of a service member who would like to receive these cookies, please contact the Blue Star Mothers by going to their website on the Internet: WWW.BLUESTARMOTHERSSC.COM. You can give them that service member's deployed address. You may also call the Blue Star Mothers at **803-206-6088**. Donations to the Blue Star Mothers are also welcome as they rely on contributions to fund this effort on a yearly basis.

DO YOU HAVE GIFT CARDS WITH TINY BALANCES ON THEM AND WONDER WHAT TO DO WITH THEM???

OPERATION MILITARY STRESS RELIEF DOLLS knows what to do with them! With the exception of restaurant gift cards, (we can't help you there), we sure know what to do with the others. The few dollars left on them may not be of any use to you, but they will be of great help to us. Would you please consider donating them to
o u r p r o g r a m ?

Alone they don't sound like much, but used together, these cards could purchase things like stuffing, fabric, yarn and other things needed to make the Dang-It Dolls for our Warriors. If you have one or two lying around and don't know for sure it there is a balance on them, send them anyway. We'll check them out. The gift cards can be
s e n t t o t h e a d d r e s s b e l o w .

Thank you for your support!
Carol Davis, Operation Military Stress Relief Dolls, Inc. 803-739-2774
P.O. Box 3356, West Columbia, SC 29171
www.militarystressreliefdolls.com



A soldier prepares for deployment, his "Dang-It Doll" strapped in for

80th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION!!!



Lexington Intermediate School— (formerly Lexington Rosenwald School)— is marking the 80th birthday of the school.

This event is scheduled for **March 28, 2009** from **10 a.m.—2 p.m.** with an opening ceremony at 10:15 a.m. **Veterans are encouraged to attend and will be recognized during the opening ceremony.**

Lexington Intermediate School is located at 420 Hendrix Street, Lexington.

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| * School Tours 12:00 | * Cookbooks for Sale |
| * Musical Performances | * Rosenwald School Artifacts |
| * Time Capsule Burial | |

VA CHANGES GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR CLAIMS PRIORITY

In 2007, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) made the decision to grant priority status to claims processing for veterans of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). The decision was based on the fact that GWOT veterans were in the process of transitioning from the service, while veterans from other periods of war had already completed their transition.

Since that time, many GWOT veterans have benefited from this prioritization. Most of these veterans have completed their transition. Like veterans from other periods, some are now reopening their claims to request an increase in benefits. Currently both original and supplemental claims are handled on a priority basis.

In an effort to be consistent with the original reasoning for establishing a priority, the VA is adjusting its prioritization criteria. Accordingly, all claims received on or after February 2, 2009, the following criteria will apply to establish GWOT prioritization for compensation and pension claims and appeals:

- A claim from a GWOT veteran within six months of separation
- A supplemental claim from a GWOT veteran for PTSD where PTSD is not already service-connected.
- An appeal from a GWOT veteran of his/her initial claim following GWOT service.

There will be **no change** to the way GWOT claims for very seriously injured (VSI) and seriously injured (SI) GWOT veterans are processed. Also, no changes are being made to GWOT prioritization in any other Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) programs.

[Source: [The American Legion Bulletin, 1/27/2009](#)]

CAMP LEJEUNE HISTORIC DRINKING WATER OUTREACH

Did you live or work at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in 1987 or before? If so, please register with the Marine Corps by visiting the website www.marines.mil/clsurvey or by calling the Camp Lejeune Historic Drinking Water Call Center at **877-261-9782**, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST.

In the early 1980's two solvents, trichloroethylene (TCE) and perchloroethylene (PCE), both unregulated at the time, were found in two water systems serving the Tarawa Terrace and Hadnot Point areas. Certain drinking water wells were identified as the source of the chemicals and were taken out of service in 1984 and 1985.

The Department of the Navy is funding two independent research initiatives. The Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is determining if there is an association between exposure to the water and certain adverse health effects. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is evaluating specific health risks associated with exposure.



Upon completion of the research, the Marine Corps will directly notify those on the registry through direct mail and email.

Camp Lejeune water meets or exceeds all environmental standards today. Drinking water wells at Camp Lejeune are tested four times a year for volatile organic compounds (VOCs), in addition to monthly drinking water sampling. The base is in compliance with all federal and state laws and regulations to ensure safe drinking water.

RE-ENACTORS MARK SHERMAN'S ATTACK ON COLUMBIA

Source: The State Newspaper, 2/8/09

The cannons were great. But for 4-year-old Tony Pack, the best part of Saturday morning's Civil War re-enactment came when a soldier offered to let him hold his saber. "Wow," Tony breathed. "I love seeing the period dress," said the boy's mother, Katie Hardee, catching sight of two young women in hoop skirts and mink. "It just comes alive that way."

The mother and son were among 150 people who gathered on the west bank of the Congaree River early Saturday to watch as "Union troops" fired on Columbia.

Starting at 8:45 a.m., three cannons set off car alarms at the riverfront park, sent birds on the wing and shook residents of the New Brookland neighborhood from their slumber. "I called dispatch about 30 minutes before it started and said, 'Better get ready for the calls to come in,'" said West Columbia police officer Brandon Field.



The day's events included bus tours of historic sites and buildings; demonstrations and appraisals of Civil War-era artifacts; and lectures by historians, concluding with a "grand ball" at the State Museum. It's the fifth year the Greater Columbia Civil War Alliance has arranged the event, commemorating Sherman's attack on Columbia in February 1865. Organizers say it has tourist potential.

For Jerry and Kay Platt, who just moved to Columbia, it was a lesson in local history. "I'm a military buff," Jerry Platt said, "and the authenticity is just great." Mike McMillan used last year's event to explore history with his grandson, Blake Henderson. The two got a book on the Civil War and made a trip to the State House to see the stars marking cannon strikes.

Anticipating another round of fire, 9-year-old Blake pressed his hands over his ears. His grandfather grinned as the shots echoed off buildings downtown. "Awesome," he said. "Don't you know it's rattling some cages over that way if they don't know what's going on."

At the edge of a semicircle of spectators in jeans and sweatshirts stood Ciara Lee of Florence and Yvonne Brunson of Lexington, both 22. They each got up before daylight to dress in four layers of costuming, from steel corsets to rustling taffeta. This time of year, the two said, they might meet up every weekend to portray Southern belles in re-enactments. They like the role. "You feel like you're a totally different person," Lee said. "Part of something," Brunson added.



West Columbia Mayor Bobby Horton was pleased at the chance to recognize the history "right here in this spot." "I'm very encouraged by the number of young people here today," he added. "Kids read about this stuff, but they can come down and actually relive it."

The whole thing -- with 10 rounds of fire -- lasted less than 20 minutes. But half the fun was talking to re-enactors afterward, looking up-close at the costumes and weaponry. As the crowd thinned out, a group of boys picked up sticks from under a sycamore tree, battling one another with make-believe swords.

GOLF ANYONE?



Lexington Women's Club is sponsoring a charity golf tournament on **Monday, March 30th at Lexington Country Club**. Sponsors and participants are needed! Tournament proceeds will benefit the Central Midlands Transitional Retreat, a local nonprofit organization helping veterans and their families.

For reservations or questions, please call Mary Ray at **359-7066** or Linda Kerner at **808-1116**. The entrance fee is **\$140 for TWO players**, due by March 23rd. The fee includes green fees, carts, lunch and awards party following play.

SUPREME COURT WILL NOT HEAR HAAS CASE

Background:

On August 16, 2006, the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) held in *Haas v. Nicholson* (now *Haas v. Peake*) that Vietnam veterans who served in the waters off Vietnam (“Blue Water” Navy veterans) are entitled to disability benefits for diseases related to exposure to Agent Orange.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) subsequently appealed the CAVC’s decision to the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. On May 8, 2008, the Federal Circuit issued a decision reversing the decision of the CAVC in *Haas v. Peake*.

On June 23, 2008, the attorneys for Mr. Haas, the National Veterans Legal Services



Program (NVLSP), filed a Combined Petition on the matter. Then, on June 30, 2008, The American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, and United Spinal Association filed a brief in support of Mr. Haas’ petition. VA filed its opposition to the petition on September 12, 2008, and on October 9, 2008, the Federal Circuit denied the petition.

Final Disposition of Haas:

On October 17, 2008, Mr. Haas’ attorneys filed a Petition for a Writ of Certiorari in the U.S. Supreme Court asking the Court to overturn the Federal Court’s decision in *Haas* that denied Agent Orange-related VA benefits to Blue Water Vietnam veterans. The American Legion and other organizations filed a brief in support of that petition.

On January 21, 2009, the Supreme Court denied the petition for Writ of Certiorari, ending any further legal challenges in the matter of *Haas v. Peake*. The VA is now free to adjudicate Haas-related claims in accordance with the May 2008 Federal Circuit Court decision.

SUPPORT GROUP MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

If you are the wife of a combat veteran, please feel free to attend the monthly wives’ support group meeting the 2nd Monday of each month in Room 110 (**auditorium**) of the Lexington County Auxiliary Administration Building.

The group will be meeting at **12:00 p.m.** on the following dates: (with additional meeting dates to come)

- March 9th,
- April 13th
- May 11th

Please come for support and discussion on helpful topics related to being a spouse of a combat veteran. This group is led by David Cox, a licensed marriage and family therapist from the Columbia Vet Center.



No reservation is necessary, but you can call the Lexington County Veterans Affairs Office at **785-8400** for more information or for directions.

Quote of the Month:

“The price of greatness is responsibility.”

-Winston Churchill

Veterans Benefits in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

Background: H.R. 1, signed into law on February 17, 2009 by President Obama, contains several items that are of particular import to veterans. Although one of the portions of the Act addresses offshore veterans in the Philippines, relief is also included for disabled veterans at home, as well as others.

Disabled Veterans and those receiving pensions:

Veterans in receipt of service-connected compensation or non service-connected pension, as well as survivors in receipt of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), will receive a **one-time** stimulus payment of \$250.

The legislation orders the Secretary of the Treasury to disburse these funds to each individual who meets the criteria as set forth in the legislation.

- ◇ **Veterans in receipt of compensation and pension benefits during any of the months of Nov. 2008—Jan. 2009** are eligible for this benefit.
- ◇ The specific regulation and timeline for receipt of these funds is yet to be written.
- ◇ Those receiving Social Security benefits as well as VA benefits need to be aware that only **one \$250 check will be received** in connection to this legislation.

**VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE
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**MARCH OUTREACH
PROGRAM DATES**

March 3rd: 9-12 Batesburg-Leesville

March 10th: 9-12 Chapin

TOLL-FREE TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Lexington Main Office: 785-8400

From Batesburg/Leesville: 332-8400

From Chapin: 941-0231

**OR CURRENT
RESIDENT**

PLEASE NOTE: If you have received this newsletter in error, please notify our office at **803-785-8400** to have your address removed from our mailing list. Thank you for your assistance in this matter.



The Blue Star Mothers of South Carolina look forward to inviting you to attend first annual black-tie gala, benefiting the veterans of South Carolina and their families.

2009 Palmetto Patriots' Ball

The Blue Star Mothers of South Carolina hope to make the 2009 Palmetto Patriots' Ball, an event that will leave an indelible impression on our guests. We hope you take home from this event, a new sense of pride and gratitude for the Veterans of South Carolina.

We will recognize those who have dedicated their lives to protect our country; preserve and secure the blessing of Liberty for ourselves and our Posterity... We honor the South Carolina Veterans of all Military Branches

The evening will be entertaining and memorable. Enjoy an elegant meal with fellow South Carolinians. Be moved by our speakers and the level of patriotism.

Speak with current and past members of our armed services. Join us as we reflect and honor our fallen service men and women and then pause as we lift up in prayer those who have not returned home to us.

There will be chances to win exciting donated prizes in our raffle, With all proceeds from the raffle being donated to this year's selected beneficiaries.

Saturday May 16th, 2009 at Embassy Suites, Columbia South Carolina

The Palmetto Patriots' Ball is hosted by the Blue Star Mothers of South Carolina, a non-profit 501 (c) 3 charity.

Contributions are tax deductible under applicable laws.

**WE HONOR
THOSE WHO SERVE**

SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, MAY 16th, 2009
6 P.M.—Embassy Suites
Columbia, SC
Single tickets—\$85.00
Two tickets—\$150.00



*****Sponsors and Prize Donations are still needed *****

To participate as a sponsor of this event, you can reach Ann Ricard and the Blue Star Mothers at 803-206-6088 or by email:

palmettopatriotsball@gmail.com